

East Dedham Village Charrette

Strategic Action Plan

December 2013





Planning Team:

Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Matthew Smith, Senior Regional Planner

Steve Winter, Economic Development Manager

Marc Draisen, Executive Director

Town of Dedham Department of Economic Development

Karen O'Connell, Economic Development Director

Funding for this project from the Town of Dedham Mitigation Funds and MAPC (from U.S. Economic Development Administration grant funding).

Table of Contents

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Existing Conditions
- III. Arts and the Creative Economy
- IV. The Charrette
- V. Recommendations



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The **East Dedham Village Charrette** is a collaborative effort between the Town of Dedham, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and East Dedham stakeholders to develop a shared community vision and strategic economic action plan for East Dedham.

The project builds on recent investment in the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center, new recreation and park areas, and a growing local arts presence to reestablish a vibrant village center in East Dedham that maximizes connections to the historic Mother Brook while looking to the larger creative economy as the economic driver.

The Charrette

The center of the project was an interactive planning charrette where area stakeholders articulated their desires for the future of this community. The charrette, which took place on Tuesday, April 23, 2013 at the new Avery School cafetorium gathered a diverse, informed, and articulate group of East Dedham stakeholders that included residents, small business owners, commercial property owners, real estate brokers, community organizations, the Town Administrator, Town staff and representatives from several Town boards and committees.

At the meeting, stakeholders worked together in small groups to provide insight and shared opinions that helped the project team understand the vision of the community. Small group activities and topics focused on:

- East Dedham strengths and weaknesses
- Defining the creative economy for East Dedham
- Visual preference collage
- Priority development/open space identification

East Dedham Village Vision

East Dedham Village will once again be the economically thriving, vibrant and attractive center of the East Dedham community.

Engaged, open and coordinated communication between residents, community groups, town leaders, business people, artists, and cultural groups will remove barriers to help create a place where targeted public and private investment create new creative economy jobs, residential options, retail, services and open space amenities for a range of people and incomes.

Arts Overlay Zoning will allow for and encourage the types of commercial and mixed-use development creative workers and neighborhood residents desire including shops, cafes and restaurants, well designed residential and working spaces, and other services clustered in a walkable village center. Public realm improvements including public art installations, improved connections and vehicle and pedestrian circulation will draw residents and customers to the area, enlivening the streets and reversing negative perceptions of the neighborhood.

The Mother Brook will once again take center stage, this time harnessing its natural and historical identity to energize and activate a creative environment with waterfront walking trails, recreation, art festivals, as well as waterfront living, dining and entertainment options.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Information gathered from the groups was analyzed by the planning team to develop a vision statement for East Dedham, and then a set of goals, strategies and actions for the community to achieve that vision

Charrette Findings

Through analysis of small group discussion and activities, common themes emerged from each of the three exercises.

In the first exercise, participants discussed what they felt were East Dedham's greatest strengths and greatest challenges. Many suggested that the area's rich history, presence of the Mother Brook, and the strong sense of community were its greatest strengths. On the other hand, changing the negative perception of the community, improving connections to the Mother Brook, and promoting a strong economic focus were identified as its greatest challenges.

During a visual preference collage exercise, a desired vision of what the community should look like, physically and economically, emerged. After sifting through over 100 images, participants selected images that depicted a mixed-use village setting, where creative workers and restaurants patronized ground floor shops and sidewalk cafes and restaurants. The Mother Brook was also a focus, offering boating and other programming along its banks including recreation opportunities and art fairs.

During a mapping exercise, the intersection of Milton, Bussey and High Streets was the focal point for the village. Each group designated the area for mixed-use structures with residences above ground floor retail. Walking paths were suggested along the Mother Brook, as were boat launch locations.

Recommendations

Based on the passionate, thoughtful and creative input of charrette participants, the project team developed four goals that when accomplished will make the vision of a active, creative, mixed-use East Dedham Village along the banks of the Mother Brook, a reality.

Goal 1: Build organizational capacity within East Dedham to advocate for community revitalization and economic growth.

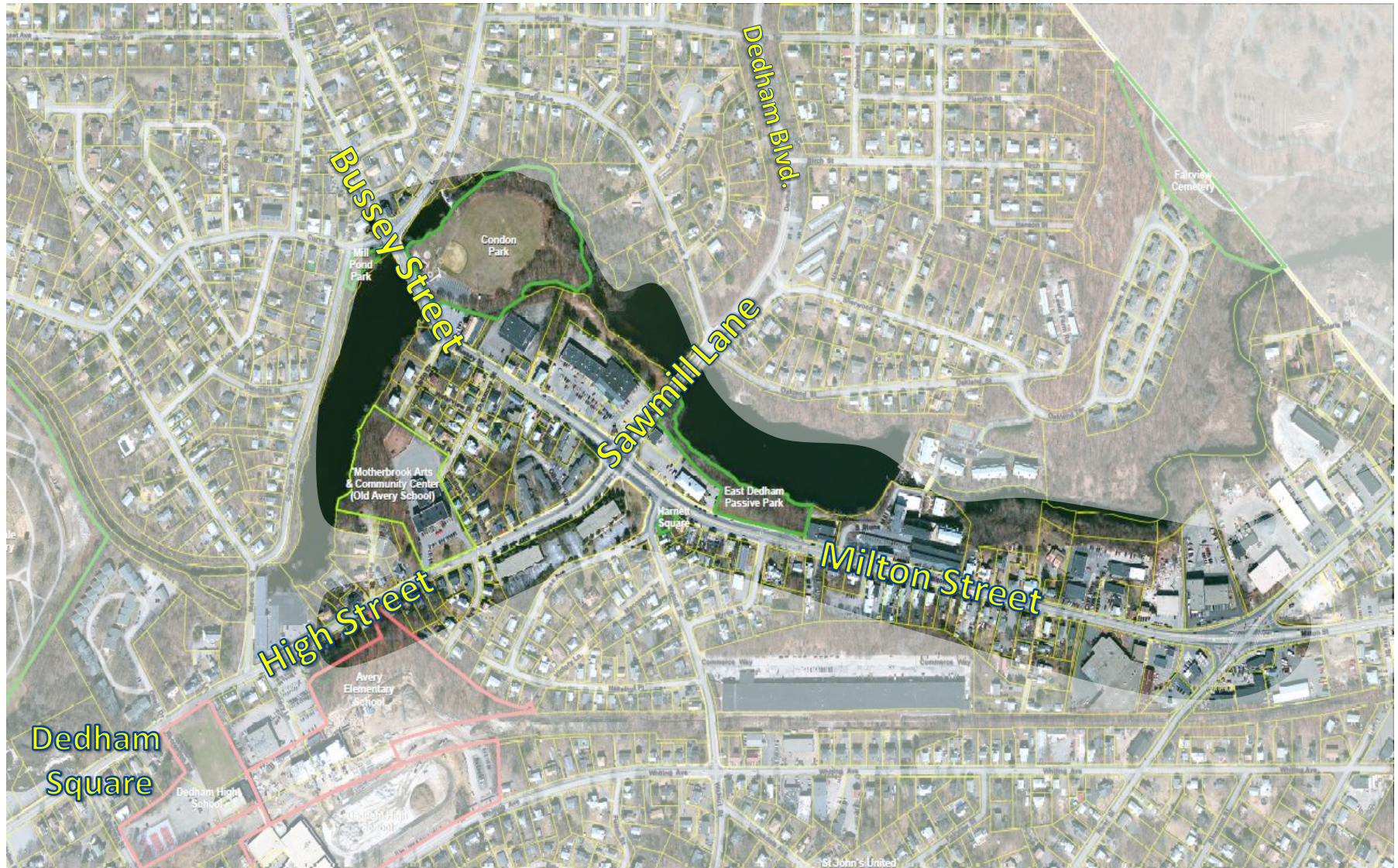
Goal 2: Ensure that the regulatory environment appropriately encourages the type and form of development desired within East Dedham.

Goal 3: Create a visually attractive public realm with a system of connected open space amenities that maximizes connections to the Mother Brook.

Goal 4: Market East Dedham as a regional center for creative economy workers and businesses.

(A series of strategies for each goal are highlighted in Section V.)

EAST DEDHAM STUDY AREA



II. EXISTING CONDITIONS



II. EXISTING CONDITIONS: historical perspective

Historical Perspective

East Dedham's history as a former mill community in large part shapes its current physical and socioeconomic working class identity.

East Dedham developed in the late 1600s to support the numerous industries that located along the banks of what today is called the Mother Brook. Constructed in 1639, the "brook" is the oldest hand dug canal in the United States. Built to connect the slow flowing Charles and Neponset Rivers, the canal provided much needed hydropower to run large large flour, textile and woodworking mills that lined the waterway, some of which remain today and have been adapted to other uses. Mill worker housing and shops followed, and a village center formed in East Dedham Square (pictured to the right) where Milton Street, Bussey Street and High Street intersect today.

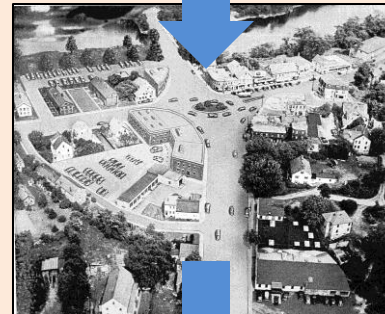
The once vibrant village included a diverse mix of commercial enterprises, shops with residences above (what we today call mixed-use), and residential structures including mill worker cottages. The area was also served by rail and streetcars, which connected the village and its residents to nearby Dedham Square, Boston and beyond.

Unfortunately, the unique village setting fell victim to automobile dominated post WWII American suburban sprawl. In particular, urban renewal plans in the 1960s cleared much of the area, and although the intention was to rebuild in a village setting, this did not come to pass. Today, the formerly dense mixed-use village is a hodgepodge of single story retail, expansive parking lots, and fragmented residential clusters. Much of the area's walkability, historical fabric and identity has been lost.

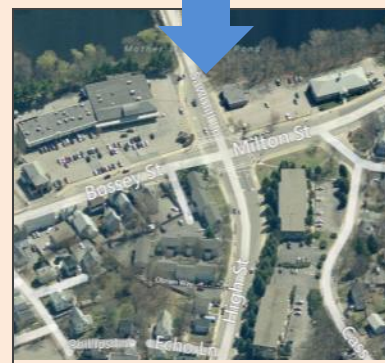
East Dedham Over Time



Early 1900s:
vibrant village
with clear
identity



Mid 1900s:
Urban Renewal
plans falter

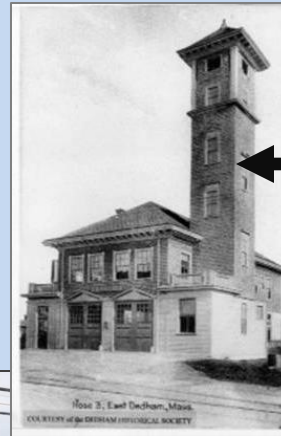


Today:
Auto-oriented,
"Anywhere USA"
intersection

Much of East Dedham's history has been lost...



...some historic fabric remains...



...and some has been adapted for new uses.



II. EXISTING CONDITIONS: demographic and housing trends

Population

East Dedham is the most densely settled area of Dedham. Today, the community has just under 5,000 residents, accounting for approximately 20 percent of Dedham's 24,729 total residents.

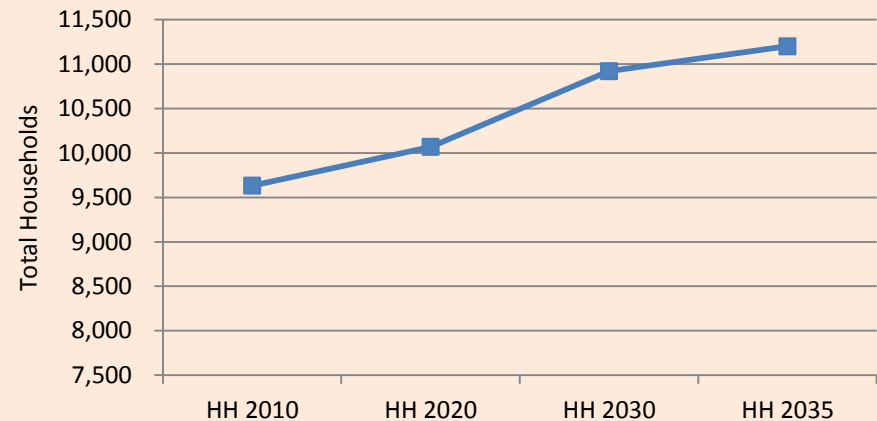
MetroFuture projections show Dedham's population will increase by over 2,000 residents by 2035. The majority of growth will be in persons 65 and older, whereas middle-aged persons (35-64) are projected to decline, and younger age groups (20-34) will hold steady. This change in age composition will impact East Dedham in terms of housing demand, amenities desired, and service costs. Attracting a younger workforce to live and work in the community can help to maintain a balanced tax base.

Households

Just over 2,000 households (HHs) reside in East Dedham. Household change and size directly correlates to housing need as each household lives in one unit. The number of people in a household and their age can predict the type of unit they wish to live in based on different life-stage preferences. For example, a family of 4 will likely prefer a different housing unit type than that of a young single, a couple without children, or a retiree.

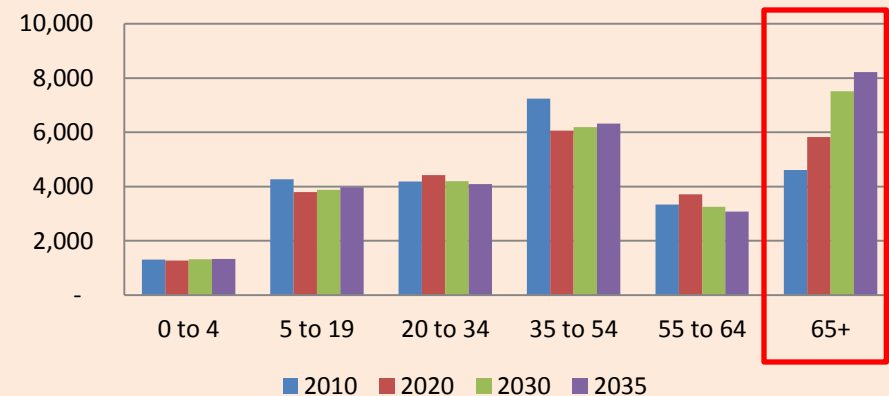
Over 1,500 additional households are expected within Dedham by 2035, according to MetroFuture projections. Most will be elderly households (55+), and many will be single-person or small families. These households often prefer smaller units in walkable, amenity rich environments, often in mixed-use and/or multi-family structures, or in live/work situations

Household Growth: Dedham 2010 - 2035



HH = households

Population Projections by Age: 2010- 2035

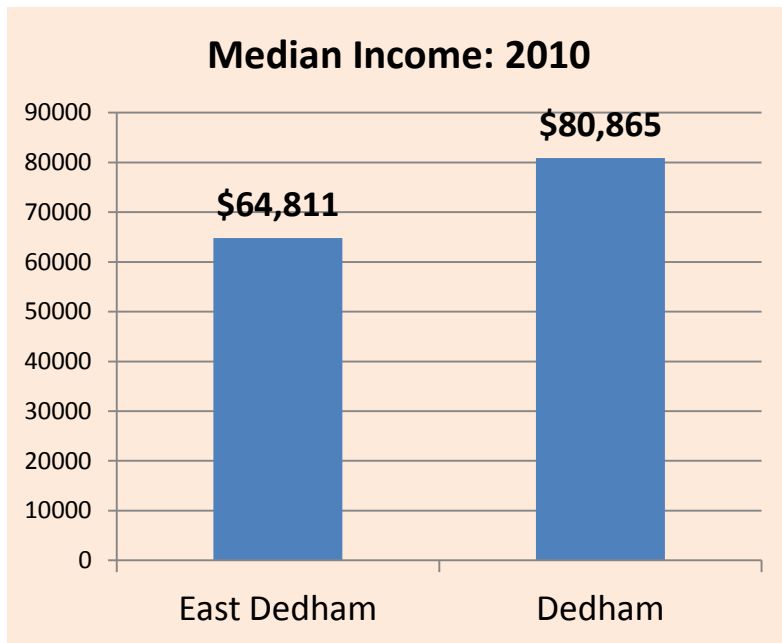


Source: MAPC MetroFuture Projections

Income and Poverty

Households in East Dedham face different economic challenges than those of the larger community. Median household incomes are lower than for all of Dedham (\$64,811 vs. \$80,865, respectively) and more are living in poverty (8.9% vs. 2.9%).

Additionally, according to 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) data, unemployment is higher for East Dedham residents (5.9% vs. 4.1% town wide).



Source: US Census ACS data, 2006-2010

Existing Housing Stock

East Dedham has a strong residential mix to support a variety of household types – large and small, young and old, family and non-family. It is important to maintain this mix as East Dedham develops.

Although the majority of units (63%) are single-family homes, 19% of housing units are in two-family structures, and 18% are in apartments or condominiums.

Approximately 60% of all units are owner-occupied, and 40% are renter-occupied. This is a lower ownership rate than the rest of Dedham (72%), however, rental units are more common in the type of multifamily structures found in East Dedham, and may explain the higher residential vacancy rate (8% vs. 6% for all of Dedham.)

The housing stock is also older in East Dedham. 52% of all units were built before 1940, compared to 38% town wide. This may factor into lower housing values in East Dedham where the median owner-occupied unit was valued at \$330,800 compared to \$377,700 for all of Dedham according to 2011 ACS data.

Rents in East Dedham are also lower. According to the Census, the average gross rent is \$1,306 compared to \$1,426 town wide. Rents may be lower due to the older housing stock in the area, which likely does not feature higher end amenities often found in newer or remodeled rental units that have been developed in other areas of town in recent years.

II. EXISTING CONDITIONS: land use and zoning

Existing Land Use

Land use refers to the type of use found on an individual parcel of land at any given time (commercial, industrial, residential, recreational, etc). Importantly, land use can and does change over time – it is not permanent – and has changed over time in East Dedham. Further, it is important to understand that land use is not the same as zoning. Zoning is a municipal bylaw to regulate the type of development on any given parcel in the present. (See the zoning section for more.)

Understanding the desired land uses and activities to be found in a community, and how a community wishes to grow, is essential to making sure the correct zoning is in place to help achieve the desired results. Today, East Dedham's land use pattern is varied, often on a parcel by parcel basis, with little cohesion or definitive pattern. A more targeted land use strategy is required to achieve the desired village setting many charrette participants supported.



Residential Uses

East Dedham offers a range of residential uses. Single- and two-family land uses are found primarily away from the major corridors (Milton and Bussey streets), with smaller multi-family mill worker cottages found closer to the Mother Brook. Larger multi-family rental and condominium uses are found along Milton Street. Although there are no mixed-use residential buildings in the area today, there was a high concentration in the past.



Commercial Uses

Commercial uses along Milton and Bussey Streets bisect the East Dedham residential neighborhoods. This includes everything from stand alone storefronts, to medium box retailers, to older reused mills with office spaces.

Among the greatest land use challenges within the area is the presence of commercial strip development and vacant parcels, specifically in the heart of the community. Areas that historically held mixed-use structures in a village

setting are now unattractive, auto-oriented retail establishments with numerous curb cuts, impervious parking lots, and poor pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhoods. Further, many of these land uses cut the community off from its greatest asset – the Mother Brook. *Industrial Uses*

Land uses along Milton Street towards the Four Corners intersection (Milton and River Streets) are a mix of automotive and other light industrial and office uses, including the Dedham Public Works Department offices. Much of this land is underutilized and holds potential for increased development.

Parks and Open Spaces

East Dedham has numerous park and recreational amenities throughout the neighborhood. Park spaces include:

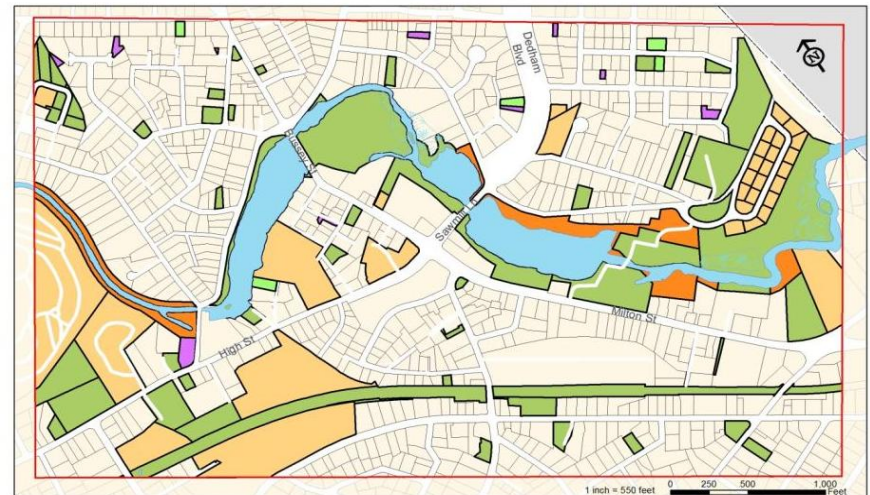
- Condon Park – includes ball fields and playground
- Mill Pond Park – waterfront pocket park
- Harnett Square – pocket park
- Old Avery School – playground (to be removed)
- New Avery Elementary/High School fields
- Walking trails – from Condon Park to Sawmill Lane south of the Mother Brook, connecting via bridge to paths on the north side east of Sawmill Lane.

Publicly Owned land

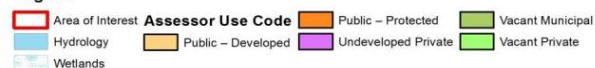
There are numerous publicly owned parcels within East Dedham. The majority of these parcels hold institutional uses (schools) or are park space. However, contiguous parcels along the Mother Brook offer a unique opportunity to create a connected network of open space amenities and programming.

Institutional Uses

Institutional uses within East Dedham include the historic fire station along Bussey Street (likely to be decommissioned in the next few years), the Old Avery School (now the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center) on High Street, and the new Avery Elementary School/Dedham High School cluster, which also include large playing fields.



Legend



II. EXISTING CONDITIONS: land use and zoning

Zoning

Zoning determines what can and cannot be built on every parcel of land within a community, including the type of uses (residential, commercial, industrial, open space) and the dimensional requirements such as what minimum size the lot must be and how tall the building can be.

There are four zoning districts located within the East Dedham Village Study area. They include:

- *General Residential*: Allows for single- and two-family residential only. Multi-family is not allowed, even by Special Permit.
- *Single Residence B (Res B)*: Allows for single-family residential by right. Conversions to 2-family and multi-family are allowed by Special Permit only.
- *General Business*: Allows for retail, services and offices, as well as single- and two-family residential. Multi-family is not allowed.
- *Limited Manufacturing*: Allows for research, labs, and limited manufacturing by special permit, gas stations, automotive, and trade shops. Retail allowed by special permit. No residential.

These zoning districts significantly limit what can be built within East Dedham, particularly within the main commercial areas. For example, the General Business district does not allow for the mixed-use, multi-family development (without a Special Permit) often preferred by senior and younger residents. Nor does it allow for the live/work spaces sought by creative workers.

Changing Zoning in East Dedham

In 2013, as a first step, a Warrant Article was brought to Town Meeting to change the zoning in East Dedham Village to allow for a mix of uses in the General Business zoning districts to those allowed in nearby, mixed-use Dedham Square. The Mother Brook Neighborhood Group supported the zoning change, however, the warrant article was foiled at the April 2013 meeting.

Although this initial effort was not successful, future efforts could be more effective with improved vision, coordination and outreach to gain community-wide support.

It is suggested by the charrette planning team to replace East Dedham's General Business zoning districts with Central Business zoning as the base district. This would allow for the greater mix of uses, and scale, found in Dedham Square. Additionally, a larger Arts Overlay district (see p. 17 for more details on Arts Overlay Zoning) should be placed over a larger area to create opportunities and attract creative workers and businesses, as well as supportive retail and services they desire.

To better ensure approval, representatives from the community should be identified to speak out publicly in support of such measures, both before the Planning Board, and especially at Town Meeting so that those attending understand the issues, and that it is supported by the larger community. This will help to adopt zoning to allow for a more active, mixed-use, walkable village center.

Arts Overlay Zoning

A number of communities have implemented Arts Overlay Zoning to encourage creative economy businesses to locate, and workers to live and work, within specified target areas. While these overlay zones do target the creative workers and businesses often credited with revitalizing blighted or underutilized areas, the goal of the overlays is often more far reaching.

Overlay districts are special zoning districts placed over the existing base zoning that provide additional use and dimensional allowances to encourage specific types of development. They are additive districts, they do not take

away what is already permitted under the base district

In particular, arts overlay districts seek to enhance the overall vitality of a community by creating the types of places that appeal to creative workers. They do so by allowing for a broader range of uses such as live/work spaces, galleries, and broader use allowances not typically allowed in business or residential districts (e.g. welding, artisan manufacturing). Essentially, they seek to foster a mix of uses, including studios and other work spaces, supportive retail and services, and residential units, all within a walkable, connected environment.

Communities within the Commonwealth who have used Arts Overlays to enhance the livability of their communities include, Lowell, Pittsfield, and Somerville.



Existing zoning within East Dedham does not allow for the mixed-use environment that charrette participants supported for the East Dedham neighborhood. Zoning changes, including a change to Central Business base zoning with an Arts Overlay would make possible the active, walkable, amenity-rich environment desired.

II. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Lowell Arts Overlay District (AOD)

Using the arts to create a vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood

The purpose of the overlay was to encourage artists to live and work in the downtown through concentration of art, cultural and entertainment attractions in the downtown area. The overlay zoning allowed the following:

- Increased flexibility with residential - live/work spaces, reuse
- Flexible use allowances /methods that would normally be against regulations. (e.g. welding)
- Greater flexibility: Second floor residential, Hotel, Library or Museums, Community Center, Retail, Restaurant, Bars, Radio or TV studio, Business and professional offices, light manufacturing, Art Craft Studio.

The overlay has been very successful, and has resulted in the conversion of existing buildings that include hundreds of housing units and studio spaces, new retail and services, and new privately developed art galleries.



Somerville/Union Square Arts Overlay District

Preserving arts in a neighborhood

Somerville's new arts overlay district (adopted in 2012) not only sets out to encourage the preservation and enhancement of arts-related uses, it aims to enhance the Union Square area as a center for a variety of uses, including retail, business services, office and housing.



The overlay allows for artist studio space, live/work space and all underlying uses, but also broadened the meaning of arts-related uses to include design and other professions (e.g. architects, interior design, digital gaming, etc.).

It also added density bonuses for projects that included deed-restricted live/work spaces for creative workers.

II. EXISTING CONDITIONS



Top: Condon Park Playground



Middle: Pedestrian crossing improvements at Milton, Bussey and High Street intersection.

Bottom: Mill Pond Park and the Grints Grinberg sculpture



Recent Investment

Although East Dedham often feels overlooked when major investments are proposed or made within Dedham (e.g. Legacy Place, Dedham Square traffic improvements, etc.), several important neighborhood investments have been made within the community over the last few years.

- The new state-of-the-art *Avery Elementary School* replaced the old Avery Elementary School.
- Pedestrian crossings at the intersection of Milton St, Bussey St, High St. have made the pedestrian environment safer around this central neighborhood intersection.
- *Condon Park Playground*, a \$150,000 investment, created a vastly improved play space for neighborhood children adjacent to the existing ball fields.
- *Mill Pond Park* along the Mother Brook currently includes a landscaped sitting area and paved pathway to the water, and Dedham's first public art (by local artist, Grints Grinbergs).
- The *Mother Brook Arts and Community Center* provides studios and other spaces for artists in the former Avery School (See Arts and the Creative Economy for more information.)

Additional investments are also planned in the area.

- A viewing platform is planned for Mill Pond Park
- A multi-use rail trail called the “Dedham Greenway” is under discussion. (A feasibility study for the first portion from the new Avery School to Dedham Square was recently approved.)
- Additional walking trails, dedicated and shared bike lanes have also been discussed as future investments.

III. ARTS AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY



III. ARTS AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Introduction

East Dedham lacks an economic focus. The area is home to numerous businesses and employers large and small, from medical device manufacturer AliMed in a converted mill building, to national and local retailers, to automotive and light industrial businesses. It is also home to numerous vacant storefronts.

An economic focus is needed to bring the community back to prosperity, and the creative economy holds promise to be that driver. Recognizing the challenges to make this a reality, the Town of Dedham's Economic Development Department embarked on this process after seeking and being awarded a Massachusetts Cultural Council Artist Link Challenge Grant.

The Arts in Dedham

The creative community in Dedham is growing and can serve as a catalyst for continued economic growth. Over the last few years, several initiatives and facilities have put Dedham on the regional arts community map.

- **Dedham Open Studios** cemented the notion that the arts community is not only active, but thriving in Dedham. The annual event, which began in 2011 was an instant success, and attracts approximately 100 artists each year, highlighting the diverse talents within the community.
- **Dedham Square Artist Guild** in Dedham Square is a cooperative art gallery with numerous works displayed throughout the year.
- **Mother Brook Arts and Community Center** in East Dedham recently opened in the old Avery School. The facility provides rental spaces for a variety of creative artists including painters, musicians, sculptures, and more, and serves as a focal point for Dedham's arts community. (See sidebar for more on this vital anchor.)



The Mother Brook Arts and Community Center (MBACC) is both a physical location, and a non-profit organization, created to serve as the creative “catalyst for the economic development, revitalization and enrichment of the surrounding (East Dedham) neighborhood and the Town of Dedham.”

MBACC is located in the repurposed Avery School in East Dedham. The facility currently features artist studios, music education (Dedham School of Music satellite) with plans for a café, art gallery, and large performance and event space. Additionally, the property includes undeveloped acres of land along the Mother Brook waterway. Plans for an art walk path are proposed.

“MBACC envisions the old Avery School as a hub of energy, experimentation and creativity, a multi-generational gathering place that uses the arts to build community. MBACC is committed to achieving excellence in programming, collaboration and renovation. We aspire to become a creative home, an environment that attracts artists of excellence and relevance, that inspires imagination and expands lives.”

(Quoted text from www.motherbrookarts.org)

III. ARTS AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

The Creative Economy

As the arts community in Dedham continues to grow, there is an opportunity to build on this momentum and help establish East Dedham as a non-urban center for the larger creative economy and the workers within it.

The creative economy, as defined by the State of Massachusetts, includes “...without limitation the many interlocking industry sectors that center on providing creative services such as advertising, architecture or creating and promoting intellectual property products such as arts, film, computer games, multimedia, and design.”

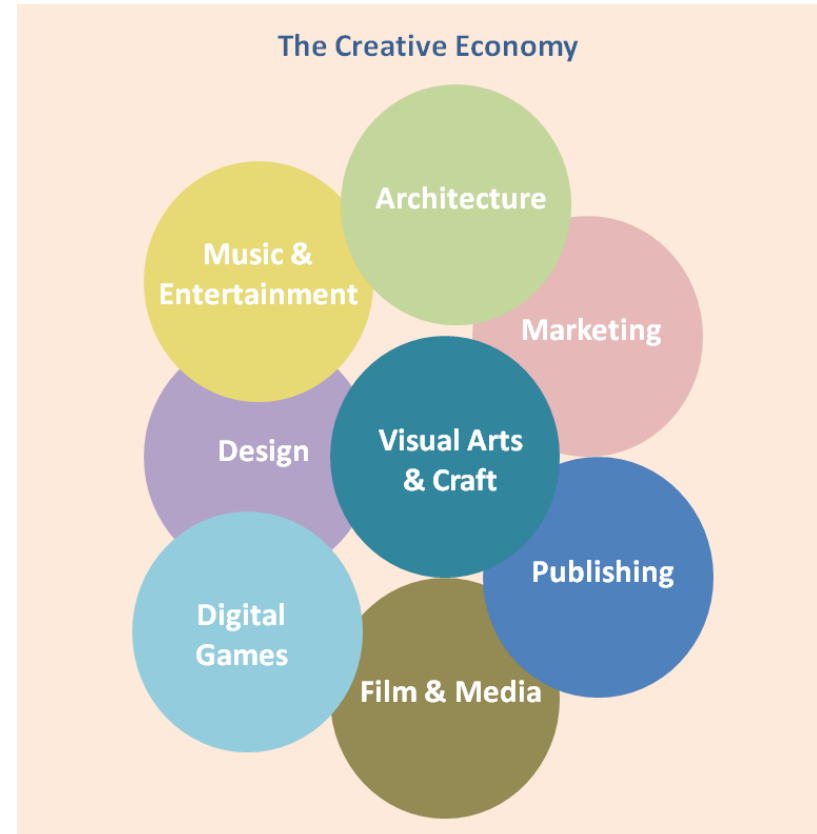
With the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center in place, the Town of Dedham sees it as the potential anchor and incubator to build a more robust creative economic engine, with traditional and new economy workers employed side-by-side in a vital, walkable, amenity rich mixed-use environment that creative workers not only prefer, but often require.

Given East Dedham’s history as a manufacturing center of textiles and pottery, along with the unique natural and inspirational amenity of the Mother Brook, East Dedham has the potential to develop a robust, active and permanent creative community.

Creative Environments

Equally important to creative economy workers is the atmosphere or community in which they work and live.

Creative workers often prefer active, collaborative mixed-use, amenity-rich environments with cafes, restaurants, and shopping in proximity to their office and/or residence.



Ensuring that the physical and social environment can be achieved can help to attract new businesses, workers and residences.

Additionally, multi-modal transportation networks with alternatives to the automobile are also desired. Currently, East Dedham is only served well by automobile infrastructure, however new bike routes are under discussion, and with increased residential densities and more jobs, other options may arise in the future.

III. ARTS AND THE CREATIVE ECONOMY: PARTNERSHIPS

Economic Development Partnerships

In order to achieve the vibrant village atmosphere and for the creative economy to firmly take root, a variety of stakeholders must work together to ensure that the right set of policies and actions are in place to make the vision a reality.

Forging and sustaining partnerships is the key. This will require various residents groups, property and business owners, arts organizations and others to reach out and work across lines with other local, regional and state partners in a collaborative manner to achieve desired results.

For example, to achieve zoning changes, the Mother Brook Community Group must engage residents, key property owners, Town of Dedham staff and elected officials, and other groups. To attract creative economy workers, the Town must work with local arts organizations, the local Chamber of Commerce, business and property owners, and local residents to ensure the right environment is created, and that the amenities needed to attract these workers are not only encouraged, but possible.

A partial list of organizations and groups key to the revitalization of East Dedham include:

Mother Brook Community Group (MBCG)

MBCG's works to bring together residents and business owners interested in revitalizing and promoting a thriving Mother Brook community in East Dedham, with a goal to raise the quality of life for all residents.

Mother Brook Arts & Community Center (MBACC)

MBACC is a 501(c)3 non-profit with a mission to build a vibrant and sustainable creative center to enrich the entire community and to serve as a catalyst for the economic revitalization and growth of East Dedham.

The Town of Dedham's

"Doing Business in Dedham Guide"

is a unique and informative step by step resource for opening a business in Dedham.

<http://www.dedham-ma.gov/dedham/file/Economic%20Development/Dedham%20Business%20Guide%20Single%20Sided%20Printing.pdf>



Dedham Square Artist Guild

The first artist cooperative in Dedham, the guild provides a home for members to display works and provides opportunities to connect the community and enrich the culture of Dedham through classes, workshops, art openings, and more.

Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce (NVCC)

The Chamber is the leading business membership organization for communities throughout the Neponset Valley region including Dedham. The chamber supports local businesses through economic advocacy efforts, marketing and promotion, networking, and more.

Dedham Economic Development & Planning Departments

The Town of Dedham Economic Development and Planning departments provide a range of tools available to effectively manage the economic and physical growth of the community.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

As the regional planning agency for the Boston metro region, MAPC's mission is to promote smart growth and regional collaboration. The agency provides technical assistance to communities in the region.

MA Cultural Council (MACC) / Dedham Cultural Council

MACC and the Dedham Cultural Council provide grants to support local community-based arts and cultural projects, including marketing resources.

IV. THE CHARETTE



IV. THE CHARRETTE

Introduction

Recognizing the desire for a revitalized East Dedham Village and the opportunity to grow the local creative economy, the Town of Dedham Economic Development Department, in partnership with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), embarked on a charrette process– an interactive meeting format - to develop a vision and action strategy for the neighborhood. The project, which was funded by Town of Dedham Mitigation Committee funds, and U.S. Economic Development Administration funds through MAPC, was developed specifically to encourage open, thoughtful and collaborative discussion about the community. The process is described below.

The Charrette Process

On Tuesday, April 23rd, at the invitation of the Economic Development Department, over 25 stakeholders and Town representatives (including the Town Administrator, Economic Development Director, Planning Director, and other department members) gathered at the new Avery Elementary School cafetorium to discuss and identify key issues, challenges, and opportunities to help shape a vision for the neighborhood with the creative economy as an economic engine.

The charrette commenced with an open house introductory hour where meeting participants were able to mingle and get to know one another while reviewing informational materials about East Dedham. This was followed by a project overview presentation by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, which included much of the information presented earlier in the Existing Conditions section of this document.

The opening hour, presentation and other display materials provided the group with a framework for the interactive component of the evening. Participants were divided into three small groups where they completed three exercises.

- I. Impressions of East Dedham – Strengths and Weaknesses
- II. Visual Preference Vision Collage
- III. Mapping East Dedham’s Future

Results from the discussions were analyzed to inform the preliminary recommendations highlighted in Section V of this document. Details and results from each of these exercises are provided on the following pages.



Exercise I: East Dedham Strengths and Challenges

The first small group exercise asked participants to highlight what they felt were the greatest strengths and greatest challenges within East Dedham.

The purpose of the activity was to provide an opportunity for general comments, and to get the group comfortable with discussion in a way that was respectful and open.

Key themes identified are listed to the right.



Strengths

- East Dedham's rich history
- Strong sense of community
- The Mother Brook
- Working class roots and work ethic
- Diversity of existing residential stock – single-family, two-family, multi-family, condominiums
- East Dedham is the “gateway to Boston”
- Convenience – it's easier to get to and from than Dedham Square
- Recent focus on open space

Challenges

- Negative perception
 - East Dedham as “the wrong side of the tracks”
 - Rebranding needed
 - Need for momentum
- Sense of isolation from the rest of Dedham. It feels disconnected physically from the rest of town
- Lack of economic or jobs focus
- Look and physical characteristics
 - Many buildings are underutilized or run-down.
 - Main corridors (Milton, Bussey) are not attractive
- Limited cultural activities

IV. THE CHARRETTE: findings



Activity II: Visual Preference Collage

The second table exercise asked each group to visualize what the future East Dedham Village would look like by creating a collage.

Participants sifted through over 100 images depicting a diverse array of creative jobs and businesses, residential, office and mixed-use structures, and open space and recreation amenities.

Each person selected 3 images that they felt expressed the future of the community. The images were not intended to be exact representations of what the East Dedham would look like, rather they provided insight about creative economy prospects, as well as neighborhood scale, design, and intent.

To further clarify and hone in on preferences, participants wrote what they liked about the image on each selected card, and discussed them with their group.

The facilitator at each table took the cards and created a visual collage representing each group's visual interpretation of the future. Significantly, many of the same images were selected by two or three of the groups, indicating a shared vision for East Dedham Village.

The selected images and direct quotes are highlighted on the following pages. In general, the exercise indicated that East Dedham should have a diverse, multi-faceted creative economy, in an active, amenity-rich, mixed-use environment with vibrant street life, jobs, shops and residential. Building design and the public realm are important and finding and planning for the appropriate building scale is crucial. Developments should take advantage of proximity to and be oriented to the Mother Brook and connect to passive and recreational amenities along the water.

East Dedham should have a diverse, multi-faceted creative economy...



"Creativity, hard work, commitment, talent, energy."
"Artists, murals on buildings."



"Exposure to and engagement with art and creativity."



"Dancing and playing with the stars in our backyard."



"The new economy comes to Dedham. Ideas, jobs, innovation in our backyard."

...in an active, amenity-rich, mixed-use environment with vibrant street life, jobs, shops and residential.



"Great and inviting streetscape."
"Vibrancy, Gathering, Enjoyment, Sidewalk Access, Mixed-Use"
"Pedestrian-friendly, intergenerational"



"Hip", diverse, affordable."



"Welcoming, curb appeal."
"Neighborhood restaurant/bar"
"Cultural and recreational connections brought to reality. BUZZ in town."



"...encourages: 1) sense of community, 2) local businesses, 3) local artists."

Images selected by participants and their quotes:

Building design and the public realm is important...



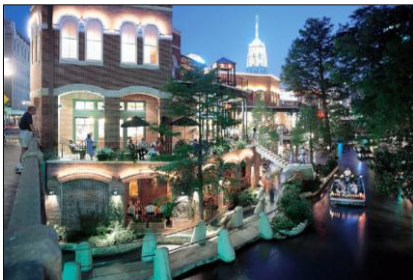
*"Indoor/outdoor, engaging, relaxing."
"Better than a Dunkin Donuts."*



"Streetscape, Building Design, Sidewalk Access."



"Streetscape, Wide Sidewalk, Mom & Pop."



"Sense of walking, appreciation of water and lighting."

...and finding and planning for the appropriate building scale is crucial.



"Love the concept at a smaller scale."



"A great building."



"Diverse, 'urban,' redeveloped housing."



*"Welcoming to residents and customers. Artfully mixing residents and business"
"Brings people to the area. Keeps them."*

Developments should take advantage of proximity to and be oriented to the Mother Brook...



"Relaxing with friends outside by the water."
"Indoor/outdoor spaces, business/commercial, high ceilings with views, near the water."



"Great for Mother Brook ."
"Use near natural area. For Rick's Pub location. "



"Outdoor dining along water."



"Events or activities that are different that will bring people to East Dedham and to Mother Brook."

...and connect to passive and recreational amenities along the water.



"A few sculptures to have people come see Mother Brook."
"A surprise in the park!"
"Hope, creativity, movement on the waterway."



"Peaceful."
"Inspire boating, fishing to promote waterway."
"Waterway re-use and recreation."



"Wonderful."
"Connecting trails."



"Walkway (maybe not so grandiose)"

Collage Exercise: Other Comments

Throughout the collage exercise, numerous thoughts about the future of East Dedham were expressed that were not directly documented by participants on the selected images. Highlights of comments overheard and recorded by the facilitators are below.

East Dedham as a Neighborhood

- Make more of a destination so people “want to” go East Dedham, not “have to.”
- Important for the community to be inviting.
- Mother Brook should be the anchor of the community
- Walking paths, sculpture parks along the water

The Creative Economy

- Encourage artisan enterprises, including manufacturing.
- Market as a place to make, create and sell in one place.
- Market the area as hip, diverse, and affordable.

Mother Brook Arts and Community Center

- The need for art and creative space is there. Over 200 people attended the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center open house.
- Use MBACC as an incubator
- Make it a symbol of creativity and centerpiece of marketing campaigns to attract creative community.

Development Opportunities

- Work with developers to achieve desired results
- Need to bring developers with both vision and capital
- Family restaurants for dinner
- Appropriately scaled enterprises along the waterway



IV. THE CHARRETTE: findings

Exercise III: Mapping East Dedham's Future Summary Findings

The third and final table exercise asked participants to consider the previous discussions about how they envision East Dedham Village – the jobs, building types, open spaces – and map it out for the neighborhood.

Each group worked around a large table map of the neighborhood. They were then asked to identify areas with difference colored dots to identify opportunities for development including:

- **Open Space:** paths, parks, boat launches, rail trails, etc.
- **Commercial:** retail, services, artisan industrial, studio space, etc.
- **Residential:** live/work, multi-family, senior housing, etc.
- **Mixed-Use:** residential, workspaces, retail, services in one structure.

The purpose of the exercise was to develop group “road maps” for the community, and to compare results from the different groups. Findings are summarized on the following pages.



IV. THE CHARRETTE: findings

Exercise III: Mapping East Dedham's Future

Small groups were presented with a map of the project area, and tasked with identifying areas they believed would be best suited for additional open space amenities, office, residential, or mixed use.

Key Findings: Residential, Commercial and Mixed-use



Parcels at intersection of Saw Mill Lane and Bussey/Milton streets best for mixed-use redevelopment.

- All three small groups identified the area as an opportunity for mixed-use redevelopment with housing, retail, restaurants, etc.
- Groups suggested orienting retail both to the road and the water (e.g. waterfront dining mentioned)
- Outdoor café/restaurants
- A “Cultural Mixed-Use District”



Light Industrial zoned area at Four Corners holds promise for redevelopment

- More of a jobs district
- Potential for artisan manufacturing.
- Potential for high tech
- Potential for some retail and restaurant.
- Not for residential



Residential redevelopment potential

- Some housing in the area is in poor condition.
- Majority of property is renter-occupied

Key Findings: Open Space and Recreation

1. Develop paths along Mother Brook

- All three small groups identified this opportunity
- Areas of Interest
 - Both sides of waterway, including behind MBACC
 - Behind the CVS shopping center

2. Railroad Right-of-Way (ROW)

- Potential for multi-use rail trail path
- Connects East Dedham to Dedham Square
- Connect to Readville Commuter Rail

3. Waterfront programming and dining

4. Potential for park with programming.

- Arts fairs
- Concerts

5. Boat launch opportunities

Other Comments

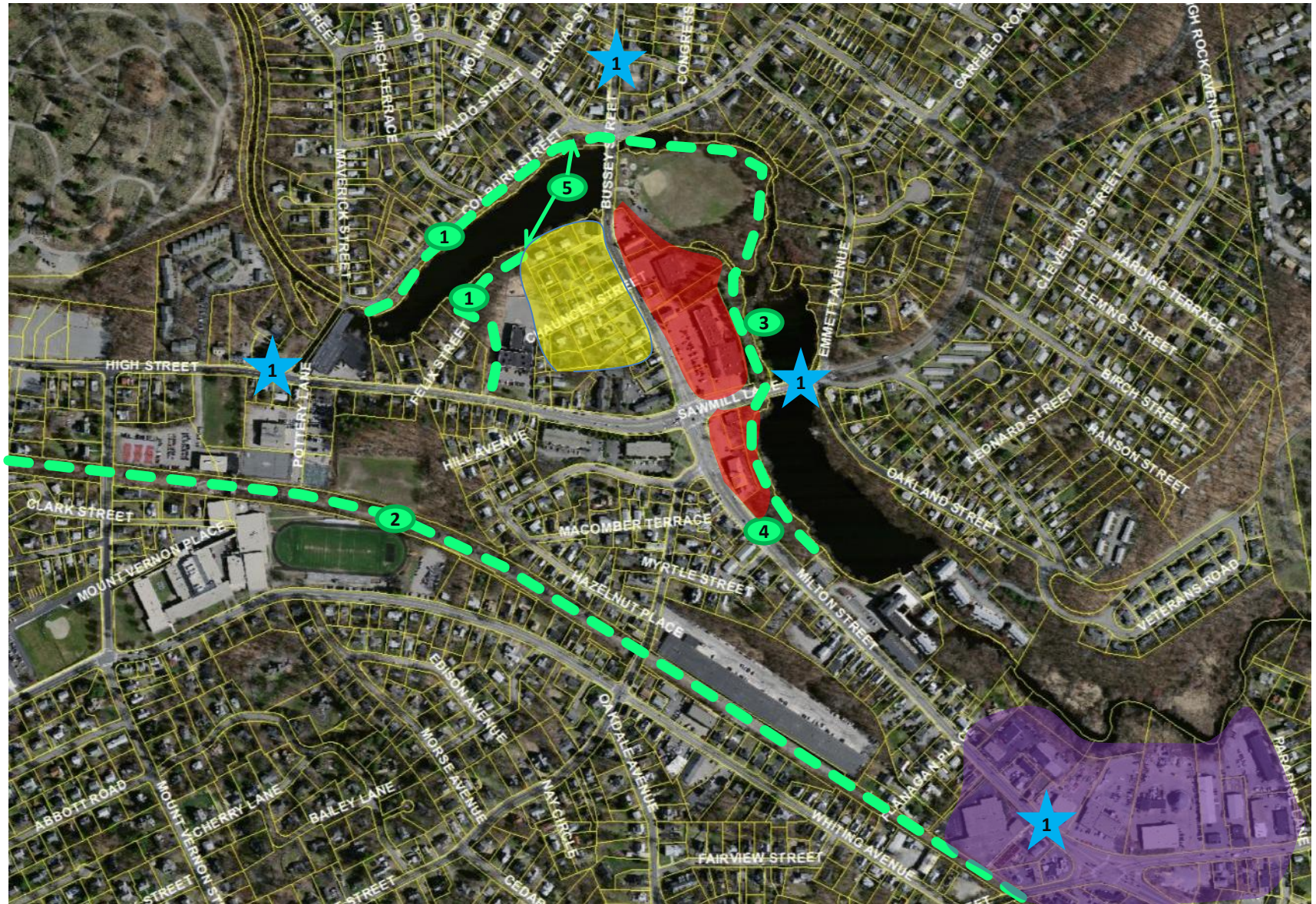


1. Gateway Opportunities

- Announce the neighborhood (w/ public art)

IV. THE CHARRETTE: findings

Summary of Comments Map



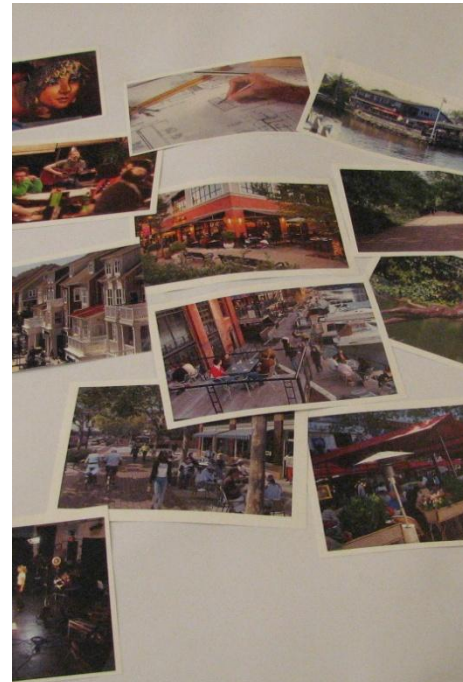
IV. THE CHARRETTE: summary

In summary, the charrette process allowed the diverse group of gathered participants to discuss and visually identify what they individually wanted the future of East Dedham to look like. However, through small group report backs during the event, discussions with participants, and subsequent review of the small group exercises, a shared vision for East Dedham emerged – an East Dedham with a walkable, amenity-rich, village setting and strong connections to an active, programmed Mother Brook.

Participants discussed the importance of a vibrant community with outdoor cafes and restaurants lining the streets and waterfront, and recreational paths along the Mother Brook. Open air markets, entertainment options and other programming, including kayaking on the Mother Brook, were also a high priority.

Surprisingly, higher density, mixed-use structures up to 3 or 4 stories with ground floor retail, were selected as good models for development, particularly on key parcels facing Milton and Bussey Streets.

And finally, support for a diverse, creative economy and the services and amenities (cafes, galleries, etc.) to serve its workers, was expressed by nearly all in the room.



V. RECOMMENDATIONS



V. Recommendations

Goal 1: Build organizational capacity within East Dedham to advocate for community revitalization and economic growth.

Strategy 1: Hold networking events at the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center to improve interaction between artists, local businesses and entrepreneurs.

Actions:

- Create a centralized database of local artists and businesses.
- Hold networking events quarterly.
- Identify local eateries or businesses to donate food and refreshments.

Partners: Economic Development Department, MBACC, Artists, Local Business Owners, NVCC.

Strategy 2: Build on success of charrette, and create a formal East Dedham Village Revitalization Working Group that encompasses diverse perspectives and interests to ensure the neighborhood develops in a manner envisioned by the community.

Actions:

- Identify and recruit key stakeholders to ensure broad spectrum of interests are represented, including:
 - Mother Brook Community Group
 - Mother Brook Arts and Community Center
 - Arts groups and organizations
 - Dedham Cultural Council
 - Local business owners
 - Local property owners

- Form the working group and meet regularly.
- Use this document to guide decision making to create a shared vision for the community.
- Advocate for shared vision, and speak out in support of good development/proposed zoning at Planning Board hearings, and at Town Meeting.

Partners: See above.

Strategy 3: Building on the East Dedham Village Revitalization Working Group, consider creating a business development task force to help existing businesses grow, attract new creative and supporting businesses, and retain existing businesses in East Dedham.

Actions:

- Identify members from Revitalization Working Group.
- Recruit local and regional business leaders to join.
- Formalize task force and meet regularly.
- Develop a property database with available spaces for lease to connect businesses with available spaces.

Partners: See above.

V. Recommendations

Goal 2: Ensure that the regulatory environment appropriately encourages the type and form of development desired within East Dedham.

Strategy 2.1: Replace existing General Business zoning districts in East Dedham with Central Business zoning to allow for the same mix of uses found in Dedham Square.

Actions:

- Convene stakeholders, including community group, local property owners, and business owners, to gain neighborhood support for effort.
- Select members to speak in support to Planning Board, and receive recommendation.
- Select members to speak in support at Town Meeting to encourage adoption of zoning change.

Partners: Mother Brook Community Group, Property Owners, Business Owners, Planning Department, Economic Development Department.

Strategy 2.2: Adopt an Arts Overlay Zoning District to encourage creative professionals to work and live in East Dedham and to create a vibrant, mixed-use village environment.

Actions:

- Identify boundaries for the overlay. Minimum area to be covered would include Milton Street and Milton Streets, between Four Corners and Condon Park.
- Review sample Arts District Overlay bylaws that have been successful in other communities.
- Draft Arts Overlay bylaw, ensuring zoning allows for spaces attractive to creative workers including live/work space, light industrial artisan workspaces, and a mixed-use environment.

Partners: Mother Brook Community Group, Mother Brook Arts and Community Center, Property Owners, Business Owners, Planning Department, Economic Development Department.

Strategy 2.3: Establish design guidelines within the East Dedham Arts Overlay District zoning for new development that encourage and promote an active, mixed-use village setting.

Actions

- Review existing Town of Dedham design guidelines to identify additional requirements to achieve results in East Dedham Village.
- Draft design criteria specific to East Dedham.
- Adopt design guidelines.

Partners: Mother Brook Community Group, Planning Department

Strategy 2.4: Create an East Dedham Economic Development working group to ensure recommendations in this document are implemented.

Actions:

- Identify members for the working group. The working group should include members of the Mother Brook Community Group, local business and property owners, the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce, Open Space Committee, the Town of Dedham Planning and Economic Development Departments.
- Formalize group and meet quarterly.

Partners: Economic Development Department (lead), Mother Brook Community Group (lead). Groups listed above.

V. Recommendations

Strategy 2.5: Work with property owners of key parcels in the study area to potentially redevelop them as mixed-use.

- Hold a developers forum with local and regional developers together with property owners to better understand current market trends and needs.

Partners: Mother Brook Community Group, Property Owners, Business Owners, Planning Department, Economic Development Department

Goal 3: A visually attractive public realm with a system of connected open space amenities that maximizes connections to the Mother Brook.

Strategy 3.1: Enhance the public realm to be more visually appealing and welcoming.

Actions:

- Work with local arts groups to develop a public art program to not only improve the streetscape environment, but to attract people to East Dedham.
- Develop an arts competition for new public art to be displayed in East Dedham (e.g. Gateway sculptures, lamp post banners)

Partners: MBACC, Cultural Council, Public Works Department, Dedham Open Space and Recreation Committee

Strategy 3.2: Make the Mother Brook a creative and recreational destination.

Actions:

- Work with the Dedham Open Space and Recreation Committee to identify priority opportunity sites for additional open space areas, including walking paths (Dedham Trails) and outdoor sculpture gardens.
- Advocate for town funding, and identify additional funding sources (e.g. FWA Recreational Trails Program), to develop walking trails along all publicly owned land along the Mother Brook. See recommendations in the Dedham and Westwood Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan.

- Develop public boat launch locations for canoeing and kayaking within the Mother Brook.

Partners: Dedham Open Space and Recreation Committee, Town of Dedham Environmental Coordinator, MBACC, MBCG.

Strategy 3.3: Develop additional programming on publicly owned land and park spaces along the Mother Brook.

Actions:

- Build on success of “National Night Out” movie event at Condon Park, and develop a summer movie series in the park or in the “passive park space” along Milton Street.
- Develop arts education/classes for individuals and families in parks along the Mother Brook (e.g. painting, sketching, etc.).

Partners: Mother Brook Community Group, MBACC, Dedham Square Artist Guild, Cultural Council, Dedham Parks and Recreation Department.

Strategy 3.4: Advocate for the complete development of the rail trail as both a recreational amenity for the community, and to better connect East Dedham with Dedham Square and the Readville Commuter Rail station.

Actions:

- Work with town committees (Open Space Committee, Sustainability Committee, others) to advocate for the funding to study the project.
- Identify funding sources to build the trail.

Partners: Dedham Open Space and Recreation Committee. Mother Brook Community Group, Planning Department, Dedham Public Works Department, Bicycle Advocates.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 4: Market East Dedham as a regional center for creative economy workers and businesses.

Strategy 4.1: Maximize potential of the Mother Brook Arts and Community Center to draw attention to and serve as a creative economy incubator for all of East Dedham.

Actions:

- Hold art fairs and music events featuring MBACC resident artists' work. (e.g. Holiday Arts Market, concerts)
- Work with local businesses and restaurants to sponsor events at MBACC to promote both the arts and the local business community.
- Organize special exhibits in the (future) on-site gallery space, featuring works from non-MBACC local and regional artists.
- Identify creative entrepreneurs with potential for business growth to locate at MBACC.
- Sponsor clinics or workshops (how to start/grow a business, financing) by partnering with the Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston or the Small Business Administration.

Partners: MBACC, Dedham Square Arts Guild, Economic Development Department.

Strategy 4.2: Identify additional spaces within East Dedham for artists to locate and/or grow their businesses.

Actions:

- Conduct a property survey of all commercial, light industrial and/or flex spaces in East Dedham.
- Develop a database of properties available and market them.
- Connect creative entrepreneurs looking to locate their business with property owners in East Dedham (e.g. retail, galleries, artisan manufacturing spaces)

- Retain MBACC artists who may need larger spaces as their businesses grow by marketing local spaces.
- Explore possibility of “pop up galleries” in vacant storefronts.

Partners: Business Development Working Group, Planning Department, Economic Development Department, Commercial Property Owners.

Strategy 4.3: Work with local and regional organizations to market East Dedham as a center for creative workers and industries.

Actions:

- Work with the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce, to develop a marketing strategy and hold networking events.
- Reach out to local artist groups (in Dedham and beyond) including the Dedham Square Artist Guild and Dedham Cultural Council to identify artists and or companies looking for space.
- Work with Massachusetts Office of Business Development to identify appropriate resources and incentives to help businesses expand and or locate in East Dedham.

Partners: NVCC, Economic Development Department, Commercial Property Owners

Strategy 4.4: Conduct a retail market study (including a gap analysis) to identify potential retail sectors to locate in East Dedham.

Actions:

- Hire a consultant or MAPC to conduct the study.
- Market vacant spaces or properties for redevelopment.

Partners: Economic Development Department, MAPC

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategy 4.5: Develop materials to promote East Dedham Village and provide information to community stakeholders.

Actions

- Identify funding for marketing materials. Could include local business sponsorship, advertising, or grant funds.
- Develop website dedicated to East Dedham Village. Website would include information about the area's history, neighborhood and town contact info, recreational amenities, arts information, development and open space proposals/projects, and upcoming events.
- Create and distribute an annual newsletter about East Dedham. Highlight annual accomplishments.

Partners: Mother Brook Revitalization Committee, Mother Brook Community Group, MBACC, Economic Development Department. .

